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AUTHOR	Hollums, Don
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ABSTRACT

The document describes how outdoor education in the Bloomfield Hills School District of Michigan can be traced to 1957, when elementary school students participated in a resident outdoor school experience for a week. In 1968, a committee on outdoor education was formally organized. The committee developed a rationale and objectives for outdoor education for the Bloomfield Hills schools. The broad objective topics which provide the rationale are: (1) an appreciation of natural resources; (2) improved instruction in science, language, arts, social studies; (3) development of recreational skills in the outdoors; (4) social experience; (5) community service; and (6) aesthetic awareness. In the document, it is noted that the outdoor/conservation education program and facilities are essential to this community, since the city has no public parks or recreation areas, and the school sites must serve as neighborhood parks. Future plans relate to youth involvement in the development of facilities, the development of a school garden-farm program, and informing patrons of the school district as to program progress. (AN)

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AN IDEA (LIKE A SEEDLING) GROWS

Genesis and Development of Outdoor/Conservation Education in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

It is impossible to identify the initial development and involvement in outdoor education for the Bloomfield Hills School District. Individual teachers in the district concerned themselves with various phases of teaching outdoors. They developed their own approaches to the study of nature, conservation, geology, and weather, without direction.

The first organized approach to outdoor education can be traced back to 1957 when an elementary principal encouraged her staff and principals of other buildings to participate in a resident outdoor school experience for a week. Two elementary schools attended the outdoor school at Proud Lake recreation area in January, 1958. At least two of the Bloomfield Hills schools have been involved in such an experience ever since.

Many of the teachers who have been involved in the resident school through the years have been responsible for a continuing interest in outdoor education. Several of these teachers interested other staff members in the possibilities of better education via the direct learning experience approach in the outdoors. Interest and participation in field trips and teaching techniques in the outdoors were enhanced by an encouraging attitude of the Board of Education and administration which permitted creativity.

School sites in the district were (are) unique in that the majority of them include exceptionally fine natural features such as woodlands, meadows, marshes, ponds, etc.. These features made it conducive and convenient for teachers to teach some principles of natural history, conservation, land use, etc., on the school site. Development of trails was attempted on several of the sites. The acquisition of two large sites for future building increased interest in the possibilities of developing a comprehensive outdoor education program for the

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Don Hollums

school district. In the fall of 1968 a committee on outdoor education was formally organized; it was composed of three elementary principals, science coordinator, director of recreation, school superintendent, director of athletics and physical education, and a member of the school board. The committee proceeded to develop a rationale and objectives for outdoor education. The rationale which evolved from the committee is as follows:

A RATIONALE FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION
FOR THE

BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICHIGAN

Definition

Outdoor education is not a subject in itself; rather, it involves a way of learning in a different and informal learning environment, a living classroom. Outdoor education not only attempts to give a child knowledge, but to provide him with countless opportunities for vital and meaningful experiences through the application of such knowledge in solving real life problems. The child lives his educational experiences through learning by doing.

Objectives

The following broad objectives of outdoor education provide a rationale and further evidence of its possibilities to enhance the learning situation as follows:

1. AN APPRECIATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES.

Conservation

Ecological Relationships

As stated, children in urban and suburban areas do not have an opportunity to appreciate the value of resources to man due to disassociation with nature. It is so simple to demonstrate soil erosion, soil layering and other phenomena to children without moving beyond ordinary school grounds. If more sophisticated trips are possible the horizons of the student can be extended to include relationships between man - land and other animals and forms of life.

2. IMPROVED INSTRUCTION IN SCIENCE, LANGUAGE, ARTS, SOCIAL STUDIES.

Observation

Classification

Children may contribute to many projects that improve their knowledge in these areas. Writing a composition on experiences in a school camp often shows enriched vocabulary and sensitivity to new experiences. It is not by accident that so many poets continually use the natural world as a background for human emotion.

Inquiry

A waterfall does not have to be as high as Niagara Falls to pro-

vide illustrations of the cutting action of water on soil and earth. A one foot drop in the schoolyard using a hose can produce in micro scale the same result. A melting twenty-five pound block of ice on a sand pile will readily demonstrate the formation of a river delta.

Nature Study

3. DEVELOPMENT OF RECREATIONAL SKILLS IN THE OUTDOORS.

Life-Long Recreational Skills

Americans are turning to the out-of-doors increasingly to find an antidote for crowded city conditions. The skills for use in the outdoors are, as might be expected, hunting, fishing, camping and water based activities. If we are to prevent moving typical city amusements to national parks it is also imperative to teach skills related to nature. Identification, collecting of fossils and other activities provide the student with necessary knowledge and techniques to make nature a personal resource for leisure satisfaction.

4. SOCIAL EXPERIENCE.

The typical response to a school camping venture almost always includes mention of the social-emotional opportunities attendant upon the experience. Teachers see their pupils in a different light and develop a broader perspective regarding a child's behavior. The value of camping to many lies in the twenty-four hour experience. A child may be observed during meals and at bed time, the two periods which cause the greatest anxiety for children. These are the periods in camp of greatest difficulty with discipline due to fears associated with the night or deprivation which is a threat at meal time but regardless provide the teacher with an opportunity to understand the emotional behavior of children.

Camping

Assuming Responsibility

It is also worth mentioning that the period in camp may represent the child's first time away from home. This is always an important first for a youngster and promotes confidence at its conclusion.

Self-discipline

The teacher may also become more human to the pupil after the informality and give and take of the camp or field trip.

There are no accurate measurement tools for this objective of outdoor education. Suffice it to say that in an age of detachment, of impersonal association, of identification problems that which promotes human relationships through common cause is valuable. Social experience really includes the child's assumption of responsibility away from home, the necessity to work through social problems in a twenty-four hour experience without running home to mother, a chance for pupil and teacher to view each other under new conditions and a chance for teachers to take another look at children and their goals and motivations without the restrictions of the classroom.

5. COMMUNITY SERVICE

Sense of Service

Many of the immediate projects of outdoor education involve service to the community. School forests, replanting in park areas, identifying the effects of erosion and similar projects which are undertaken perhaps for other primary academic purposes contribute to the development of a community spirit. It provides a practical outlet for youngsters and teenagers to release their energy in a socially valuable rather than destructive fashion.

And it also provides the patrons of the community with opportunities to help in the developing of outdoor projects and to pursue their own nature study interests.

6. AESTHETIC AWARENESS

New Experiences

"Headstart" programs invariably include cultural enrichment features which take the child from a deprived environment to one rich in opportunity to view, observe, to participate in the finest the culture has to offer. This involves museums, art galleries, concerts and libraries. It should also include parks, natural retreats, historic monuments and those natural virtues of the land that represent the living cultural heritage of the nation. It is applicable to all youngsters living in urban areas regardless of economic background.

Some of the top priority objectives suggested are:

1. To develop specification of needs to fulfill the objectives of each subject area in relation to outdoor education.

2. To identify school district personnel/local patrons/state and national individuals who could be of assistance toward development of the program.

3. To develop immediate and long range plans for development of school district sites for outdoor education, physical education, athletics, and recreation programs.

4. To survey existing outdoor education programs at the local, state, and national level.

5. To develop specific curriculum guidelines for implementing outdoor education programs in the district.

6. To develop teacher inservice meetings toward the use of outdoor education sites and facilities.

7. To develop a systematic public relations program to inform local school district personnel and patrons in the school district of the outdoor education program.

One member of the committee enrolled in an outdoor education seminar at Michigan State University during the winter term, 1969. The writer was also enrolled in the seminar, resulting in his acceptance of a position with the Bloomfield Hills School District to further develop and coordinate outdoor/conservation education. Employment in this capacity began on September 1, 1969. Since that time considerable attempt has been made via staff meetings to reach the teachers, tell them of our goals, and enlist their aid. The nature trail which was created on the 32 acre natural area, hereafter referred to as Forest Park, has proven to be extremely popular. Numerous classroom field trips have introduced outdoor interpretation to about 400 youngsters, in grades Kindergarten through sixth. In addition numerous field trips have been conducted on several of the individual school sites. Frequent classroom visitations have been made to focus attention on such diverse topics as rocks and minerals, predators and prey, pollution, etc.. Outdoor interpretive trips have also been conducted for Boy and Girl Scouts and, on one occasion, for representatives from a garden club. (Convinced of the worthiness of the outdoor education project, the garden club contributed $100.00 to the program.

Whereas the City of Bloomfield Hills, in fact, the entire township of Bloomfield, has no public park or recreation areas, the school sites must serve the entire community needs for neighborhood parks. To meet these needs service projects which involve community organizations will be planned. One such project was the planting of five hundred red pine seedlings obtained from the Department of Natural Resources by Boy Scouts at Forest Park as a troop project. Other projects now underway include development of animal shelters and animal feeding stations.

Plans for youth involvement in the future at Forest Park include development of nature trail interpretive signs by students, renovation of a small stream which was damaged considerably by siltation as a result of sewer line installation through the property, further tree and

and shrub planting, wildflower transplantings salvaged from the paths of construction, etc., animal surveys, bird banding, ecological study, etc..

A school site survey form has been developed to assist the committee, administrators, and students to identify specifically what types of animal and plant life they have on their site. The survey will actually be a complete inventory of everything on the site. Students and teachers will conduct the inventory throughout the year. The survey is designed to be a teaching tool for teachers as well as providing the committee with an inventory of the site.

Another phase of outdoor/conservation education study in the Bloomfield Hills School District is the development of a school garden-farm program, patterned after that of the Battle Creek, Michigan, Public Schools. Preliminary plans call for employment of a full time farmer (classified as maintenance personnel) to assume duties January 5, 1970. The development of this program is possible due to the acquisition of a 48 acre parcel for a future building site. Fortunately, a comfortable house and an adequate barn were acquired with the property. These existing facilities will enable the program to get underway quickly. The hilly nature of the farm will provide excellent opportunities to demonstrate proper conservation practices. It is planned that the individual schools will have separate garden plots. Plans are to involve interested secondary youth (particularly potential drop-outs) in a co-op type of program at the school farm.

Some proposed facilities and programs at the farm site include a re-created farm of yesteryear, complete with barnyard animals, old machinery, garden plots, farm woodlot with sugaring shack, and hiking and snowmobile trails.

The success of such a program will depend on the acceptance and utilization by teachers. To help facilitate a broader philosophy of outdoor education among the Bloomfield Hills teaching staff, a Michigan State University off-campus course in Outdoor Education will be

taught in Bloomfield Hills beginning January 12, 1970, designed to the needs and desires of the course participants. Fortunately, a second Michigan State off-campus course, Conservation Education, will be taught during the spring term at Oakland University, only twelve miles away. Every encouragement will be given for teachers to take either or both courses.

In an effort to keep the patrons of the school district informed as to the progress of the program, the April, 1969 issue of the Bloomfield Hills School District News carried an article "Outdoor Education: Today's Plan is Key to Tomorrow". The purpose of the article was to explain to the patrons exactly what outdoor education is and the plans for the program in the future. Other articles have since appeared in the local papers to keep the lines of communication open.

A "nature" newspaper was written by students of an elementary school for the purpose of exchanging information between the schools and for motivating interest in outdoor activities. It is planned that the newspaper will become a monthly feature and that each school will take a turn at producing it.

The outdoor education committee mentioned previously, now enlarged, meets once a week to discuss and resolve any problems, formulate ideas, and plan strategies of attack. Key local resource people are being invited to share ideas with the committee regularly. These people include classroom teachers, agricultural agents, personnel from nearby Cranbrook Institute of Science, representatives from the Department of Natural Resources, etc.. A school bus is being made ready for the exclusive use of the outdoor education program. The bus will be equipped with a public address system as well as audio-visual aids, so that it will in effect become a mobile classroom.

Many ideas, like seedlings, are growing. Like seedlings, the ideas must be given constant nourishment if they are to reach fruition.

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